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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000054

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01-12-14

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SUBJECT: Japanese proposal for donor meeting in Colombo during upcoming Akashi visit unpopular with other donors

Refs: Colombo 51, and previous

(U) Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead.  
Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Japan has proposed that Special Envoy Akashi convene a formal "Tokyo Follow-up Meeting" during his late-January visit to Sri Lanka. Both the GSL and most, if not all, other donors think a formal meeting is not a good idea. They prefer to see Akashi's visit as a prelude to a February Co-chairs meeting in Washington. Donors will hash this out January 12 and 13. The GSL is also trying to dissuade Akashi from visiting Kilinochchi. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) During a January 10 meeting with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and Milinda Moragoda on the political situation, (see Reftel), conversation turned to the January 19-25 visit of Japanese Special Envoy Akashi and an early-February Co-chairs meeting in Washington. Donors, including the U.S., had received a fax from the Japanese Embassy on Friday, January 9, stating that during his visit, Akashi would "convene a second Follow-up Meeting of the Tokyo Conference" on January 23. This provoked strong reactions in Colombo. Dutch Ambassador Susanna Blankhart (recently taken over the EU Presidency in Colombo, since Ireland has no resident mission here) called Ambassador that same afternoon in high dudgeon. She said she saw no purpose in such a meeting, since the peace negotiations were at an impasse and donors were likely to be uncertain what to do. The Ambassador told her that we, the Italian Ambassador who was her predecessor representing the EU Presidency, and the Norwegian Ambassador had all advised Japanese Ambassador Suda several times that we thought a formal follow-up meeting would not be helpful during Akashi's visit.

3. (C) During a January 11 conversation with the PM, Milinda Moragoda said that he also thought that a formal "Follow-up Meeting," with its attendant communique, press conference, etc., would be a bad idea. Donors have a number of serious issues to consider in light of the impasse in peace negotiations, and a loosely-structured and quickly-prepared meeting in Colombo is not the place to deal with them. In addition, Moragoda said, Akashi is planning a trip to Kilinochchi to meet Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) leadership after the proposed Follow-up Meeting. Milinda said he had told Suda that (a) any donor meeting should be informal and (b) this was not a good time for Akashi to go to Kilinochchi. Milinda said that Akashi's visit should be seen as on-the-ground preparation for the February Washington meeting. Milinda also thought that only the U.S. could turn the Japanese around.

4. (C) Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar made many of the same points in conversation with the Ambassador on the morning of January 12. Brattskar felt the issues the donors needed to grapple with now were sufficiently complicated that they could not be dealt with properly in such a meeting. Brattskar thought it would be particularly bad for Akashi to visit Kilinochchi after a formal donor meeting, since that would put pressure on Akashi to convey the "donor position" to the LTTE. Brattskar thought it would be far better for Akashi to see the LTTE (and the GSL) first and then report to an informal donors meeting on what he had concluded. This could then fit into the preparations for a February meeting. Brattskar said that he would call Helgesen and suggest Helgesen phone Akashi directly to make these points.

5. (C) Japanese Ambassador Suda had earlier invited the large donor group to a meeting on Tuesday, January 13. He has now abruptly asked the smaller Co-chairs group to a meeting on the afternoon of Monday, January 12. We surmise that he realizes he is in for a rough ride and wants to see if he has any support before he confronts the larger group. The trick will be to make him see -- and to get him to convey to Tokyo -- that Akashi's visit can be useful, but that a formal Tokyo follow-up meeting

during the visit will not serve that purpose.

16. (C) COMMENT: This Akashi visit is following the same pattern as the last one in September 2003, in which Tokyo proposes to dictate the program without consultation. That prior experience may be one reason for the unexpectedly vociferous donor reaction here, which is probably not helpful. Brattskar has commented that the EU is quite suspicious of the Japanese trying to obtain a larger -- and in the EU view -- unwarranted role for themselves. We will try in the meetings here on Monday and Tuesday to steer this gently in the right direction so that the Japanese can change course without losing too much face. END COMMENT.

LTTE Calling  
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17. (U) In the meantime, LTTE "Planning and Development Secretariat" has sent e-mails to most donors inviting

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them to a January 19 meeting in Kilinochchi to discuss "options and strategies to initiate and coordinate new rehabilitation and development programs in the Northeast, particularly during the transition period." Several donors, including UK and Norway, have already accepted this invitation.

18. (C) The Department may recall that a similar invitation to the inauguration of the Planning and Development Secretariat in late November 2003 caused considerable division within the donor community, and was eventually cancelled by the LTTE. This time around, a number of donors seem to want to treat this as a simple working-level discussion, similar to those they have on a bilateral basis with LTTE. UK High Commissioner Evans told the Ambassador that he had immediately fired off a positive response "without consulting London." This may be an attempt by the UK and others who wanted to attend the original meeting to avoid an EU row by pre-emption. Dutch Ambassador Blankhart told the Ambassador January 9 that the issue would be discussed at an EU coordination meeting January 12. Seems the UK has beaten the others to the punch.

19. (C) The Department may also recall that the USAID Director had received an invitation to the November 2003 meeting. The USAID Director, who is currently out of town, has received another invite this time around. We do not believe this meeting (which would feature a speech by LTTE Political Leader S.P. Thamilselvam) would meet our criteria for meeting with the LTTE at the working level for discussion of technical issues only.

10. (U) Minimize considered.

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